



# Bell Smith Springs



Shawnee National Forest

Hidden Springs Ranger District

2014

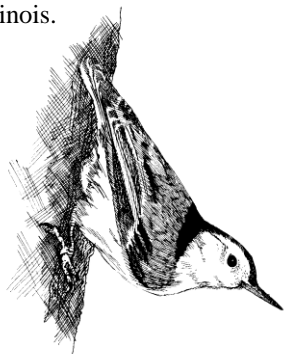
**B**ell Smith Springs is one of the most beautiful recreation areas the Shawnee National Forest has to offer. It contains a series of clear, rocky streams and scenic canyons bordered by high sandstone cliffs and an abundance of vegetation unique to Illinois. The trail system consists of seven miles of interconnected trails featuring strange and wonderful rock formations, such as Devil's Backbone, Boulder Falls and a natural rock bridge. Hiking this system of trails is a favorite activity because of the rock features, scenic overlooks, hidden springs and lush flora and fauna.

## Trail Highlights

Interpretive signs at the main trailhead explain the unique ecosystem of Bell Smith Springs and history of the area. Stone steps built into the side of the cliffs lead to the bottom of the canyon. Magnificent oak and hickory trees dominate the wooded slopes along the trail, while the bottom of the canyon is filled with huge beech creek-beds and tulip poplar trees. During the spring months, the forest floor is alive with colorful wildflowers. The trails pass deep pools along the creek's edge, rock shelters in the bluffs and magnificent rock formations. You will encounter several scenic overlooks, some of which provide views of Bay Creek. Trail loops include Sentry Bluff Trail, traveling along an exposed sandstone cliff above the canyon floor; Mill Branch Trail, winding on either side of Mill Branch Creek; and Natural Bridge Trail, crossing the highest natural bridge with a span of 125 feet and an arch of 30 feet.

## National Natural Landmark

Due to the area's distinct number of plant communities and its unique geological features, it has been designated a National Natural Landmark. This combination of geological and ecological qualities has created a variety of habitats for a diversity of plants and wildlife. Birders come from all over the country to find tanagers, sparrows, pileated woodpeckers, eastern phoebes and several different species of vireos. The canyons and wooded slopes provide habitat for over 700 species of flowering plants, ferns and lichens. That is about 20% of the total number of plants and lichens known in the entire state of Illinois.



## Surrounding Area

Burden Falls and Bay Creek Wildernesses, Millstone Bluff Archaeological Site, Lake Glendale Recreation Area, Trigg Fire Tower, Jackson Hollow and River to River Trail.

### **Length :** 7 miles of interconnected **hiker-only trails**

Sentry Bluff Trail – 2.7 miles

Mill Branch Trail – 1.5 miles

Natural Bridge Trail – 1 mile

### **Surface Type :** Dirt and rock

**Difficulty Level :** Moderate to difficult. To reach the canyon floor from the main trail, you must descend a stone stairway. During wet seasons the water level at creek crossings will be over ankle height.

### **Recommended Season :** Spring, summer and fall.

**Facilities :** Parking, vault toilet and interpretive signs. Redbud Campground is also within the recreation area.

**Access : From Harrisburg:** Take Highway 145 south 11 miles to Burden Falls Road. Turn right onto Burden Falls Rd., go 5 miles to Ozark Rd. Turn south (left) onto Ozark Rd., go 2 miles to Bell Smith Springs Rd. Turn southwest (right) onto Bell Smith Springs Rd. and proceed 2 miles to the Bell Smith Springs Recreation Area.

**From Vienna:** Take Highway 45 north 12 miles to Ozark Road. Turn east (right) onto Ozark Rd., go 10 miles to Bell Smith Springs Rd. Turn southwest (right) onto Bell Smith Springs Rd. and proceed 2 miles to the Bell Smith Springs Recreation Area.

**Safety :** Extra caution should be used where the trail is near the bluffs and when traveling on wet slippery rocks. Beware of poison ivy and poisonous snakes. Due to the remoteness of the canyon, precautions should be taken before hiking (carry water, food, first-aid kit, etc.). And visitor's should also be aware that search & rescue efforts may not be as rapid as expected in an urban setting.

**Trail Ethics :** Pack It In, Pack It Out. Some rare and endangered species of plants are located in the area so please stay on the designated trails and leave the rocks and plants for others to enjoy. Equestrians are prohibited on this trail system.

## Emergencies

The nearest hospital is Harrisburg Medical Center in Harrisburg.

## For More Information

Hidden Springs Ranger District

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[www.fs.usda.gov/shawnee](http://www.fs.usda.gov/shawnee)

# Bell Smith Springs Trail System

